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Dear Parent/Carer,

Changes to SQA National Qualifications

Last September, Scottish Government announced changes were to be made to National Qualifications over a period of three years, starting from session 2017-18 with National 5 qualifications. Changes to Higher qualifications will be made from session 2018-19, and to Advanced Higher qualifications from session 2019-20. To date, SQA has issued detailed information only about how National 5 will be affected.

National 5: What is changing?

The fundamental change being made to all qualifications is the removal of all unit assessments from course awards. This decision has been made to allow more time for learning and teaching, and to reduce the amount of assessment experienced by young people taking national qualifications. As a result of the removal of the unit assessments, however, course assessments have been strengthened. This means for each National 5 course, one or more of the following changes has been made:

- Extension of the existing examination paper
- Extension or modification of the existing item of coursework
- Addition of a new examination paper
- Addition of a new item of coursework

This means that there will now be an examination in some subjects, which up to now had none: this means, for example, there will now be an examination at the end of the course in Administration and IT, Care, Engineering Science, Hospitality – both Cake Craft and Practical Cookery - and in both Practical Metalworking and Woodworking. In other subjects, the change will be seen in the coursework assignment that has to be completed, or pupils will have to sit a longer examination at the end of the course.

A further change announced by SQA is to the grade boundary for a Grade D. A Grade D will be awarded to a candidate who achieves a notional 40%-49% in the examination. Previously, Grade D was given only to those with 45% or above.

How will this affect your child?

The Senior Phase, S4-S6, is designed to ensure that there are a range of pathways open to pupils to help them gain a range of qualifications, at different levels, at a rate that best suits them. There are different routes to each of the qualifications, which allow pupils to pick up awards at different levels along the way.

With the changes to qualifications, it is important that pupils are entered at the correct level to ensure they gain an award at the end of S4. Schools have to make decisions about course entries by the end of November: these decisions will be based on a range of assessment information, gathered over time. The aim will be to ensure that all pupils are entered at a level where they will be challenged, but can still achieve. Pupils will only be entered for the National 5 if the school is confident that they will succeed in getting at least 40% in the course. If pupils are not yet ready for presentation at National 5, they will be presented at National 4 in S4, and may also be able to cover some elements of the National 5 course. Thereafter they may progress to National 5 in S5, with a far greater likelihood of success.

In session 2017-18, SQA has indicated that there may be an opportunity for a very small number of candidates to achieve a National 4 Award by using Recognising Positive Achievement arrangements. This is likely to require candidates, who are thought to be on the borderline of achieving/not achieving National 5, to have successfully completed all the unit assessments for National 5 **and** the Added Value Award for the corresponding National 4 Award. This is a considerable amount of extra assessment, given the increased assessment demands in the National 5 coursework and the examination.

Because of these increased demands, every effort will be made to ensure pupils are entered at the correct level when entries are made in November this year: this means pupils will, in the main, be presented for only the course award or for only freestanding units.

Further Information

On Monday 25th September (5 – 6 p.m.), there will be an *Introduction to the New Qualifications* evening at Inverurie Academy. This will include an overview of changes and the approach we are taking at Inverurie Academy, followed by an opportunity to hear responses to specific questions from Mr Robert Fraser of the SQA. You can sign up to attend this event through using the following link (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/an-introduction-to-qualification-changes-tickets-35386636382>).

However, if you would like more general information on the changes to National 5 qualifications, please refer to the SQA website: www.sqa.org.uk/nqchanges.

Yours sincerely



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